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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [EUN](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [BE](#) [EAID](#)
SUBJECT: EU CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY PROGRAMMING IN IRAN

REF: STATE 2659

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Laurence Wohlers for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Poloff delivered reftel demarche Feb. 27 to Francois Massoulie at the European Commission, who just returned from Tehran where he said the mood is "gloomy" regarding any collaboration between Iranian NGOs or individuals and Western governments. Massoulie, the desk officer for Iran at the Commission's Directorate for External Relations (RELEX), was interested in hearing about US programming in Iran, but noted that the EU views any association with the US in Iran as "the kiss of death." Because the Iranian government is convinced, he said, that the US is seeking regime change in Iran, the EU does not want any public association with US programs. The Iranian regime also views the EU with suspicion, leading the EU to funnel most of its programming (which the EU refers to as civil society programming, not democracy programming) through UN organizations, primarily UNDP and UNICEF, he said. One of the most successful programs is one aimed at reducing the demand for illegal drugs, primarily among prostitutes.

¶2. (SBU) Separately, Poloff and Development Counselor met Feb. 22 with Jorg Volker Ketelsen of the European Commission's Unit for Human Rights and Democratization at RELEX to discuss the new European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and its possible implementation through small grants in Iran (and other countries). The European Commission currently has no cooperation agreement, no country strategy paper, and no contractual agreements with Iran. But the new EIDHR, which will provide USD 1.1B globally over the next seven years, has a provision for giving grants to civil society organizations in "difficult situations" such as Iran. The grants will go specifically to civil society organizations that work on democracy building or protection of human rights. Civil society is defined broadly to include non-governmental organizations, journalists, and even Parliamentarians doing non-campaign outreach work. The first calls for proposals are expected to be issued in the fall, with grants from the new funding awarded late this year. The current year's EIDHR projects are being finalized, but the EC has confirmed there will be one project for an Iranian beneficiary in the category of prevention and rehabilitation of torture victims. Additionally, the EC funds partnerships between European and Iranian NGOs, including one between the British Institute for Comparative Law and an Iranian NGO called IDVV.

¶3. (SBU) The European Commission is also interested in starting a Farsi language broadcast program into Iran (probably through Euronews, though other proposals will be solicited). The funding and implementation would be shared between DG Relex and DG Communications. Ketelsen expressed interest in coordinating with the US so as not to duplicate efforts.

¶4. (SBU) A number of other ideas for engaging Iran through

public diplomacy, human rights, and civil society were discussed at the Jan. 26 COMEM meeting. While the proposals are still at the working group level, they provide a roadmap of areas of possible future EU engagement. The ideas under discussion include the following:

- Continued "double track" approach to human rights that combines critical dialogue with public statements
- More European Community action, possibly including the seconding of a Commission official to a member state Embassy in Tehran.
- Including Iran in the Erasmus Mundus program to strengthen support for exchanges of scholars and to increase Embassy contacts with local universities.
- Increased programming to civil society (particularly focusing on women's rights) from abroad, for example web-based NGO training.
- Support for new areas of cooperation that are less sensitive to the government of Iran, for example organized crime, narcotics, environment, health, and rescue services.
- Reinforce working through the UN, particularly through special rapporteurs.
- Increased attention to Iran's regional role, especially in relation to the Middle East Peace Plan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Afghanistan.
- Further dialogue on regional security among regional players, including the Gulf Cooperation Council.
- Further dialogue on involving Iran in the International Compact for Iraq.

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